



# SILENCING OR SHAPING? A QUANTITATIVE STUDY ON THE EFFECTS OF CANCEL CULTURE ON JOURNALISM STUDENTS' VALUES AND REPORTING STRATEGIES IN BANGALORE

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## ABSTRACT

This study looks at how journalism students' professional ideals and reporting methods are affected by cancel culture, and whether it leads to ethical rerouting or self-censorship. Emerging journalists may find it difficult to control public outrage, which is frequently sparked by social media, or to voice opinions that are deemed controversial. The participants in this study are undergraduate and graduate journalism students in media and communication departments around Bangalore City. In order to evaluate the influence of cancel culture on students' attitudes, actions, and perceptions of journalistic culture, practice, and expressive freedom, the study used a structured quantitative questionnaire and asked a sample of more than 150 participants to respond.

The study's main objectives are to ascertain how cancel culture affects journalism students' self-censorship when reporting, evaluate shifts in their professional perspectives, and pinpoint coping strategies brought on by perceived hardship. Because respondents said they adapt their strategies to avoid answering challenging or contentious questions out of fear of criticism, initial impressions point to a moderate to high degree of value shift. However, several participants said they try to convey opposing viewpoints in ways that lessen the harsh criticism that can be found online. By offering data on the effects of cultural phenomena like cancel culture on aspiring reporters, this study contributes to the body of knowledge already available on digital ethics and journalism education. It highlights how important it is for journalism education to have teaching approaches that emphasize censorship, ethical decision-making, and coping mechanisms.

**KEYWORDS:** Cancel Culture, Journalism Students, Self-Censorship, Reporting Strategies, Media Education, Professional Values

## INTRODUCTION

Cancel culture, that public shaming and boycotting phenomenon driven by social media, has become a significant force, even though it started out as a form of activism. It's now powerful enough to sway how people act, impact reputations, and even control conversations. This whole shift is creating unique challenges for journalism students in Bangalore as they're still figuring out their professional footing. The fear of online backlash or criticism can lead them to hold back, avoid sensitive topics, or overdo the neutral framing to sidestep controversy. Our study explores how these young journalists are dealing with these pressures. Their responses give us a glimpse into the broader changes happening in how a socially conscious and tech-savvy generation of journalists balances their ethical duties with their freedom to express themselves. Ultimately, by looking at their experiences and the strategies they use, we aim to understand how cancel culture is shaping their journalistic identity and what this means for journalism education in today's digital world.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

### 1. The Chilling Effect on Young Journalists: Learning to Self-Censor Early On

A recent survey by Norris (2024) of about 2,000 academics globally sheds light on how cancel culture impacts academic

freedom. She found that people with different viewpoints often stay silent, not because they're officially censored, but because their institutions sometimes create an environment that doesn't really welcome diverse ideas. This creates a "chilling effect," leading to widespread self-censorship, especially when political topics are involved. This situation mirrors the challenges faced by journalism students. If these young people are growing up in learning environments that shy away from tough conversations, there's a risk they might start self-censoring very early in their careers. This could, in turn, weaken their ability to act as independent watchdogs, a crucial role for journalists in the future.

### 2. Why Journalism Students Hold Back: Reputation, Peers, and the Classroom Environment

Research by Farquhar & Carey (2019) found that journalism students often hold back what they say, especially when they're in groups. This usually happens because they're worried about their reputation, what their classmates might say, or how people in general might react. Their study highlighted that this self-censorship often comes from internal expectations and fears, rather than from official rules. Because of this, Farquhar & Carey suggested that journalism instructors should encourage students to take risks and create safe spaces where controversial topics can be discussed openly. These findings are

really important because they help us understand the coping strategies students use and the personal factors that shape their professional development as future journalists.

### 3. The Shadow of Self-Censorship: How Cancel Culture Shapes Journalism from the Classroom to the Newsroom

A recent study by Whipple (2025) in the U.S., based on interviews with culture journalists, revealed a concerning trend: cancel culture is directly influencing editorial decisions. These journalists often admitted to changing their stories before they even published them, just to avoid potential backlash. Many simply steered clear of controversial subjects altogether, prioritizing caution over the freedom to express their ideas. Whipple's study warns that this "pre-emptive editing" could become the new normal and highlighted the urgent need for better support systems within news organizations. For journalism students here in Bengaluru and elsewhere, seeing these trends in the professional world might lead them to copy similar cautious behaviors during their training. This could, in turn, shape their core values and reporting approaches towards playing it safe rather than digging deep with critical questions.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To examine how journalism students perceive the influence of cancel culture on their freedom of expression and reporting choices.
- To analyze the extent to which cancel culture impacts students' professional values—particularly objectivity, ethics, and neutrality.
- To investigate the coping strategies and adaptations students use in response to the pressures of cancel culture.

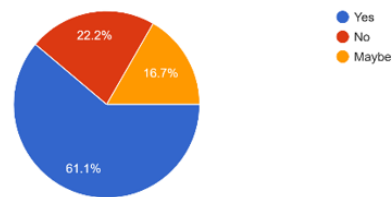
#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- How frequently do journalism students report altering or avoiding content due to the fear of being "cancelled"?
- What is the relationship between students' perception of cancel culture and their willingness to report on controversial or sensitive topics?
- To what extent do students believe that cancel culture is shaping their journalistic identity and ethical decision-making?

#### METHODOLOGY:

To understand how cancel culture is influencing journalism students, we collected our information through a Google Forms survey that included both multiple-choice questions and Likert-scale questions (where students could rate their agreement on a scale). This questionnaire was shared with undergraduate and postgraduate journalism students attending various colleges right here in Bengaluru. We used a simple random sampling method and managed to get more than 150 valid responses in total. To ensure honest answers, everyone's responses were kept completely anonymous. Finally, we looked at the frequency and patterns in the students' answers, using pie charts to visualize trends in their self-censorship habits, how they cope, and how cancel culture is affecting their journey to becoming professionals.

Do you feel that cancel culture influences your choice of topics for assignments or articles?  
162 responses



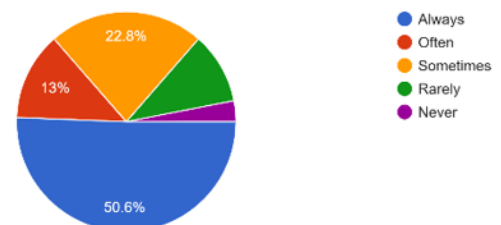
**Fig. 1: Impact on Freedom of Expression and Topic Selection**

Frequency	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	99	61.1%
No	36	22.2%
Maybe	27	16.7%
Total	162	100%

**Table. 1**

A significant majority – 61.1% of students – admitted that it influences their choice of topics. This strongly suggests a real change in how they approach their reporting. Only a small group, 22.2%, said they weren't affected, while 16.7% were unsure. Even among those who were undecided, it hints that the influence of cancel culture might still be at play. This data really backs up the idea that cancel culture directly impacts students' freedom to pick and pursue certain journalistic topics.

To what extent do you modify your writing to avoid offending specific groups?  
162 responses



**Fig.2: Influence on Journalistic Values and Expression**

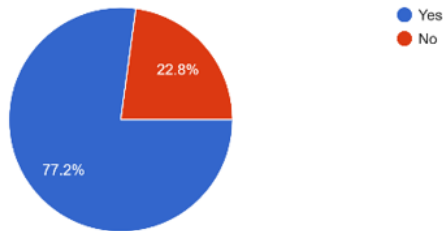
Frequency	Respondents	Percentage
Always	82	50.6%
Often	21	13.0%
Sometimes	37	22.8%
Rarely	17	10.5%
Never	5	3.1%
Total	162	100%

**Table. 2**

Over half – 50.6% of students – reported that they always change their writing to avoid upsetting anyone. Add to that another 35.8% who said they often or sometimes use caution, and you see a clear picture: a huge majority of students are actively adjusting their language. In fact, a tiny 3.1% claimed they never alter their writing at all. This overall pattern really highlights how cancel culture is influencing the way journalism students express themselves, leading to a shift in their writing

values and a clear preference for editorial caution.

Have you seen fellow students self-censor due to fear of being "cancelled"?  
162 responses



**Fig.3: Self- censorship Among Peers**

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	125	77.2%
No	37	22.8%
Total	162	100%

**Table. 3**

A significant 77.2% of the students we surveyed reported actually seeing their classmates hold back what they say or write in journalism classrooms or in student media. This suggests that self-censorship isn't just a personal experience for these students, but something they're collectively adapting to. The fact that students are seeing their peers self-censor so frequently indicates that it's becoming a normalized behavior within their groups. This really highlights how cancel culture is shaping not just individual actions, but also the overall group dynamic and how journalism students are learning to cope together.

### INTERPRETATION:

When all the results are considered, it's indicated that cancel culture significantly influences journalism students' freedom of expression, their editorial decisions, and even their peer behavior. A majority reported that certain topics were being avoided and their writing was regularly being modified to prevent backlash, revealing a shift toward cautious, self-censored reporting. Additionally, many students observed similar behavior in their peers, suggesting that a collective norm of restraint is being fostered within journalism classrooms by cancel culture. These findings highlight a growing tension between journalistic values and social pressures, with concerns being raised about how future journalists are being trained to handle controversial or sensitive issues.

### FINDINGS:

- Cancel culture is widely recognized among journalism students, with many reporting that it affects their editorial decisions and freedom of expression.
- A significant number of students are actively avoiding controversial topics. For example, 99 said it affects their topic selection, and 112 admitted to holding back their writing to prevent backlash.
- Pressure from peers and the fear of judgment are playing a big part. Seventy-six students feel pushed to agree with popular opinions, and 79 are swayed by what their peers approve of.

- It's not just an individual thing; 125 students have seen their classmates self-censor. This suggests it's becoming a normalized part of the student media environment.
- Students have mixed feelings. Many believe cancel culture promotes accountability, which is good, but others feel it limits free speech, creating an ethical dilemma.
- Interestingly, some students also see benefits. Over 100 students believe cancel culture has actually made them more ethical and sensitive in their reporting.

### DISCUSSION:

The findings indicate that among journalism students, an internalized mentality of gatekeeping is being promoted by cancel culture. While it does foster awareness and caution, it may also lead to restrictions on opinion-based journalism and bold investigative reporting. It seems that for many students, editorial decisions are being sacrificed for social acceptance and safety.

However, cancel culture was also viewed by some participants as an opportunity to refine their reporting ethics, strengthen their fact-checking techniques, and gain a better comprehension of audience sensitivities. These two outcomes imply that cancel culture is not entirely detrimental; rather, it is seen as encouraging moral development, critical thinking, and audience-aware communication. Therefore, in journalism education, a balance between these risks and rewards must be found in curriculum design and mentorship.

### LIMITATION:

Since it focused solely on journalism students in Bengaluru, the findings may not fully capture the broader national perspectives on cancel culture. Additionally, the data collected was self-reported, which means responses could have been influenced by what students felt was expected or socially desirable.

Furthermore, because only quantitative methods were used, a deeper exploration of personal experiences could not be achieved. The absence of data collected over a longer period also means that only a snapshot of student perceptions at one specific point in time has been captured. Lastly, the generalizability of these findings is limited due to the exclusion of working professionals from the study.

### CONCLUSION:

According to the study's findings, the values and editorial choices of journalism students are greatly impacted by cancel culture. Their developing journalistic identities are shaped by the protective strategies and introspective practices that are elicited by it. Even though it frequently results in self-censorship, awareness of moral limits and public sensitivities is also raised.

To properly prepare students for the complexity of contemporary journalism, discussions on digital literacy, freedom of expression, and public accountability must be incorporated into the curriculum. By giving aspiring journalists these resources, they can be helped to respect the fundamentals of the field while navigating the difficulties presented by cancel culture.

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